

Aaron Goode
45 William Street
New Haven CT 06511

I am the founder of the New Haven Votes Coalition, a nonpartisan alliance to increase voter participation and civic engagement in New Haven, and an executive committee member of the League of Women Voters - New Haven / West Haven chapter.

I would like to testify in favor of three bills in today's hearing -- HB 6578, SB 1017 and SB 753.

HB 6578: AN ACT CONCERNING PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

Codifying the automatic voter registration (AVR) administrative agreement between DMV and the Secretary of the State into statute is prudent and will place AVR on a firmer legal footing. We should always be trying to create a stronger, more durable legal footing for things that are good! But we need to go beyond AVR that only draws on information collected by DMV. Up to 40% of New Haven residents do not have cars and do not necessarily interact with the DMV. They are completely left out of the benefits of the current AVR system.

AVR should be expanded to the Department of Social Services (DSS), Department of Revenue Services, HUSKY, Access Health CT, state colleges and universities and other state agencies. We may have a database of people signing up for Covid vaccines, or for Covid relief loans or cash assistance, that could also be included. If the state is already collecting this information, we should be allowing our residents to benefit by not requiring them to file a duplicative voter registration form.

AVR is good for younger voters and new voters, it is good for streamlining the workload of local election officials who no longer have to deal with a proliferation of paper forms, it is good for ballot integrity and security, and 77% of Connecticut voters support it, according to a recent Secure Democracy public opinion poll.

With respect to voting rights for parolees, the zip code 06511 in New Haven has the most individuals who would be affected by this legislation of any zip code in Connecticut. When I talk to people involved with New Haven's prison re-entry initiative, what I hear is that parolees want and need to be re-integrated as quickly and thoroughly as possible; one small way to do that is to allow parolees to be re-enfranchised *without respect to fines*. We have seen recently in Florida how poverty is weaponized against people trying to have their voting rights restored. That is not the path Connecticut should take.

SB 1017: AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Often people come to me with their election horror stories. This year a number of people told me about absentee ballots they requested taking weeks even months to arrive in the mail. I have one very close friend in New Haven, who is actually a League of Women Voters member, who told me her absentee ballot that was requested on October 10 arrived in the mail on December 2. Even under the best-case scenario first class mail from New Haven has to go to Hartford to be sorted, and a letter sent 5 blocks can take 5 days to arrive. According to New Haven's town clerk, in some elections as high as 8-10% of absentee ballots are disqualified because they arrive late. After the expansion of absentee ballots in 2020, many more people are interested in voting absentee and we do not want to go back to the old system of not having a permanent dropbox option so our absentee voters can have peace of mind that their vote has arrived in time to be counted.

Another provision about including ABs in our randomized post-election audits -- my colleague Luther Weeks of CT Election Audit has been all over this issue. This change must accompany any expansion of absentee ballot access.

SB 753: AN ACT CONCERNING THE COUNTING OF INCARCERATED PERSONS FOR PURPOSES OF DETERMINING LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS

What is very frustrating from the perspective of New Haven is that relatively affluent municipalities like Cheshire not only receive 100% PILOT reimbursement for their prisons but on top of that they also get representation in the legislature for incarcerated people whose permanent residence is really elsewhere. Meanwhile New Haven is receiving 20 cents on the dollar for PILOT reimbursement while its representation is effectively being taken away or watered down through the practice of prison gerrymandering. That is adding insult to injury to our beleaguered cities. Let us instead strengthen our cities and give them the full representation they deserve by eliminating prison gerrymandering and doing so as soon as possible so that the next redistricting will better reflect demographic reality.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on these matters.